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DOCTOR
STRANGE
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
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Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other!

STAN LEE PRESENTS: DR. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

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THE·OLD·DARK·HOUSE

MONTHS AGO, STEPHEN STRANGE, AND HIS MOST IMPLACABLE HUMAN FOE, BARON MORDO, TOGETHER WITNESSED THE SECOND CREATION OF OUR UNIVERSE.* THAT TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE FILLED DR. STRANGE WITH AWE AND WONDER. IT DROVE MORDO INSANE.

EVER SINCE, HE HAS LIVED IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM IN STRANGE'S GREENWICH VILLAGE HOME. HE DOES NOT MOVE OF HIS OWN VOLITION, NOR DOES HE SPEAK. IN ALL THINGS, HE HAS BEEN AS HELPLESS AS A NEW-BORN BABE.

AT LEAST, THAT IS WHAT DR. STRANGE BELIEVED-- UNTIL TONIGHT.

MORDO--HERE?! IMPOSSIBLE!

THE LONGER I LIVE, ALFEO, THE MORE I LEARN THAT--WHERE THE *MYSTIC ARTS* ARE CONCERNED--

--NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.

*BY THE 31st-CENTURY SORCERER, *SISE-NEG*--WHO WAS HIMSELF TRANSMOGRIFIED INTO THE GOD KNOWN AS *GENESIS*--IN *MARVEL PREMIERE* #'S 13&14 -- JO.

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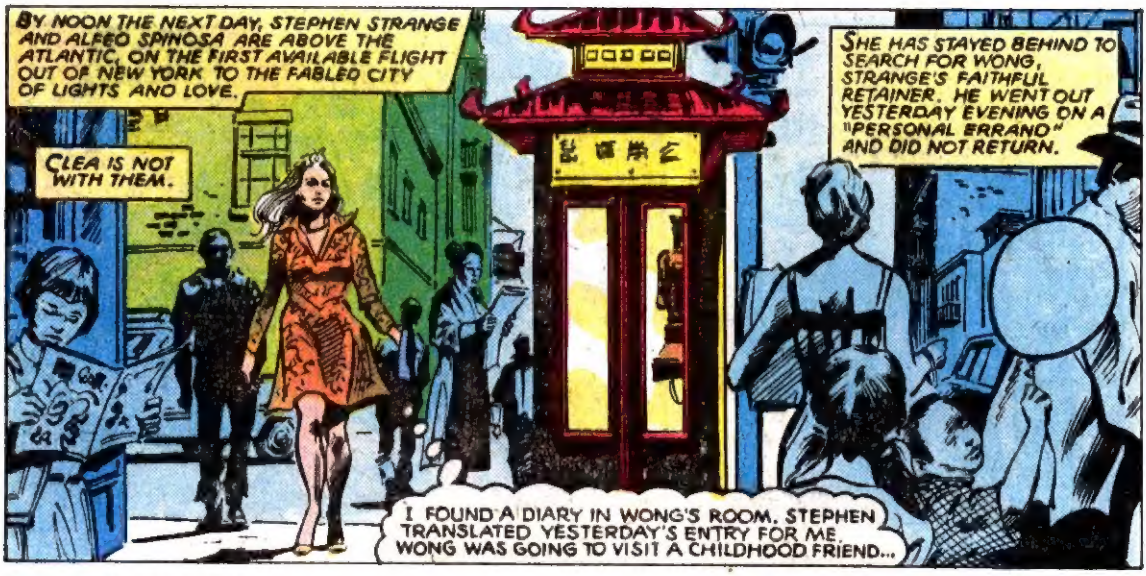
AND THAT EVEN THE MAN SOME CALL "SORCERER SUPREME" MAY BE FOOLED.
I DON'T UNDER-STAND.
THE PRIEST IS ALFEO CARDINAL SPINOSA, CURATOR OF THE VATICAN'S SAN GABRIEL ARCHIVES.
HE HAS COME TO NEW YORK TO ASK DR. STRANGE'S HELP.
WATCH, ALFEO.
POOF!
BY THE OMNIPOTENT OSHTUR! BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH! IN THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL VISHANTI! SPIRIT FORM -- BEGONE!
RETURN TO THE DUST AND AIR FROM WHENCE THOU CAME!
MORDO'S -- GONE!
HE WAS NEVER HERE.
BY ALL THE HORDES OF HADES -- HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO STUPID -- SO CARELESS?!
THE WOMAN IS CLEA. SHE IS THE MAGE'S DISCIPLE, AS WELL AS HIS LOVER.
LOOK AT HIM, CARDINAL... PACING, BLAMING HIMSELF!
STEFANO HAS ALWAYS HATED FACING THINGS HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND, PROBLEMS HE CAN'T SOLVE.
BUT WHY MUST HE KEEP HIS FEELINGS TO HIMSELF?! WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP HIM, IF HE'D LET US!
IT WAS A MASTERFUL STRATEGEM.
THE SPIRIT FORM WAS CREATED FROM ELEMENTS OF MORDO'S OWN FLESH -- TO ALL APPEARANCES, IT WAS MORDO.
HE HAS BEEN ALONE MUCH OF HIS LIFE, SIGNORINA, FORCED FROM CHILDHOOD TO DEPEND ON NO ONE BUT HIMSELF.
SADLY, SUCH HABITS ARE NEAR-IMPOSSIBLE TO BREAK.

A SIMPLE MYSTIC EXAMINATION WOULD HAVE TOLD ME THE TRUTH AT ANY TIME, BUT WITH ALL THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING TO ME, I NEVER SEEMED TO GET THE OPPORTUNITY.
"ALL THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING..."
AGAIN, AS THEY HAVE SO OFTEN THESE PAST WEEKS, HIS THOUGHTS TURN TO HIS RECENT BATTLES...
...WITH A HOST OF SORCEROUS FOES. HE WON EACH BATTLE, YET FOUND HIMSELF GRIPPED BY THE FEELING -- THE... FEAR? -- THAT A FAR DEADLIER OPPONENT LURKED JUST OUT OF REACH...
...ATTACKING STRANGE THROUGH HIS DEMONIC MINIONS, WHILE HIDING HIMSELF IN THE SHADOWS, UNTOUCHED AND UNTOUCHABLE. READY AND WAITING TO STRIKE AGAIN.*
*DOC'S FOE WAS THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS, FOUGHT IN ISSUES #30 AND #'s 32-37 -- JO.
ANOTHER MYSTERY BEGAN EARLIER THIS EVENING, WHEN STRANGE -- TAKING A WELL-DESERVED BREAK FROM HIS WORK -- TOOK CLEA TO A LOCAL VILLAGE NIGHT-SPOT HE'D FREQUENTED AS A MEDICAL STUDENT.
THEY WERE HAVING A WONDERFUL TIME...
...UNTIL A YOUNG MAN NAMED DOUGLAS ROYCE WAS SLAIN BY MEANS OF EVIL SORCERY. STRANGE AND CLEA HUNTED DOWN HIS MURDERERS -- LEGENDARY AMERICAN INDIAN DEMONS KNOWN AS EYE KILLERS.
AFTER A FIERCE FIGHT, STRANGE MANAGED TO DEFEAT THEM.*
WHAT BROUGHT THOSE DEMONS TO NEW YORK? AND WHY NOW?! AN ISOLATED INCIDENT -- A COINCIDENCE --
--OR A PIECE OF SOME LARGER PUZZLE?!?
AND, AS IF THAT WEREN'T ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT...
*AS WE ALL SAW LAST ISH -- JO AGAIN.

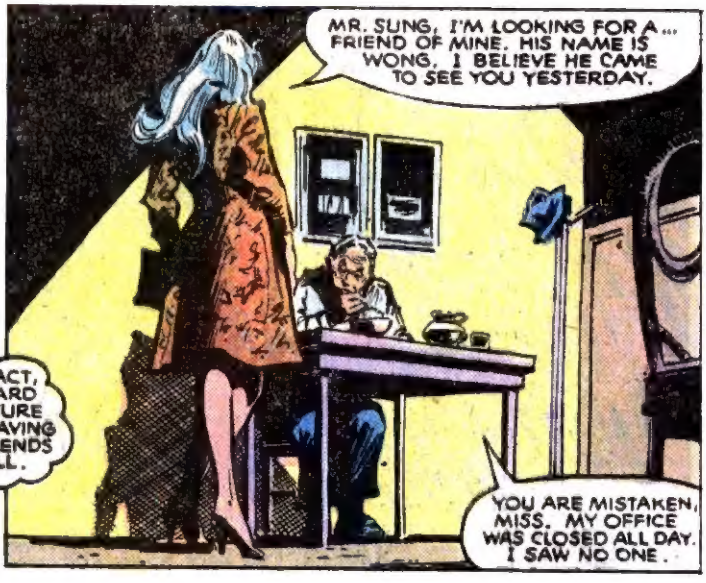
... NOW ALFEO BRINGS ME A PICTURE OF MORDO ROBBING THE SAN GABRIEL ARCHIVES, THE GREATEST STOREHOUSE OF OCCULT LITERATURE IN THE WORLD.
POOR MORDO -- AFTER ALL THE CARE HE MUST HAVE TAKEN TO ELIMINATE THE LIBRARY'S MYSTIC DEFENSES...
...HE WAS PHOTOGRAPHED BY AN ORDINARY SECURITY CAMERA.
STEPHEN...?
Uhm?
NOTHING, REALLY.
YOU SEEM SO... LOST. ALMOST IN PAIN. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE A HUG. AND A KISS.
AND THAT WILL MAKE ALL RIGHT IN THE WORLD, eh, CLEA?
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD...
... BUT IT MIGHT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.
I... AM SORRY, CLEA. I'VE A LOT ON MY MIND.
I'VE NOTICED.
I'LL TAKE THAT KISS NOW, THOUGH...
...IF YOU'RE STILL INTERESTED.
ALWAYS...
...YOU SILLY...
MMMMMM
THE MOMENT IS RARE, BEAUTIFUL, SUPREMELY PRECIOUS, AND TOO QUICKLY OVER.
BOTH WISH THEY COULD HAVE MORE SUCH MOMENTS.
BOTH KNOW THAT THEY PROBABLY HOPE IN VAIN.
I'D INTENDED TO INVESTIGATE THE REASONS BEHIND DOUGLAS ROYCE'S MURDER, BUT I'M AFRAID MORDO IS THE MOST PRESSING THREAT.
ONE OF MY OLD ALLIES SHOWED AN UNUSUAL INTEREST IN MORDO WHEN WE LAST MET -- HE MAY BE ABLE TO HELP US LOCATE HIM.
COME, ALFEO, CLEA -- THERE IS MUCH TO DO BEFORE WE LEAVE FOR PARIS.

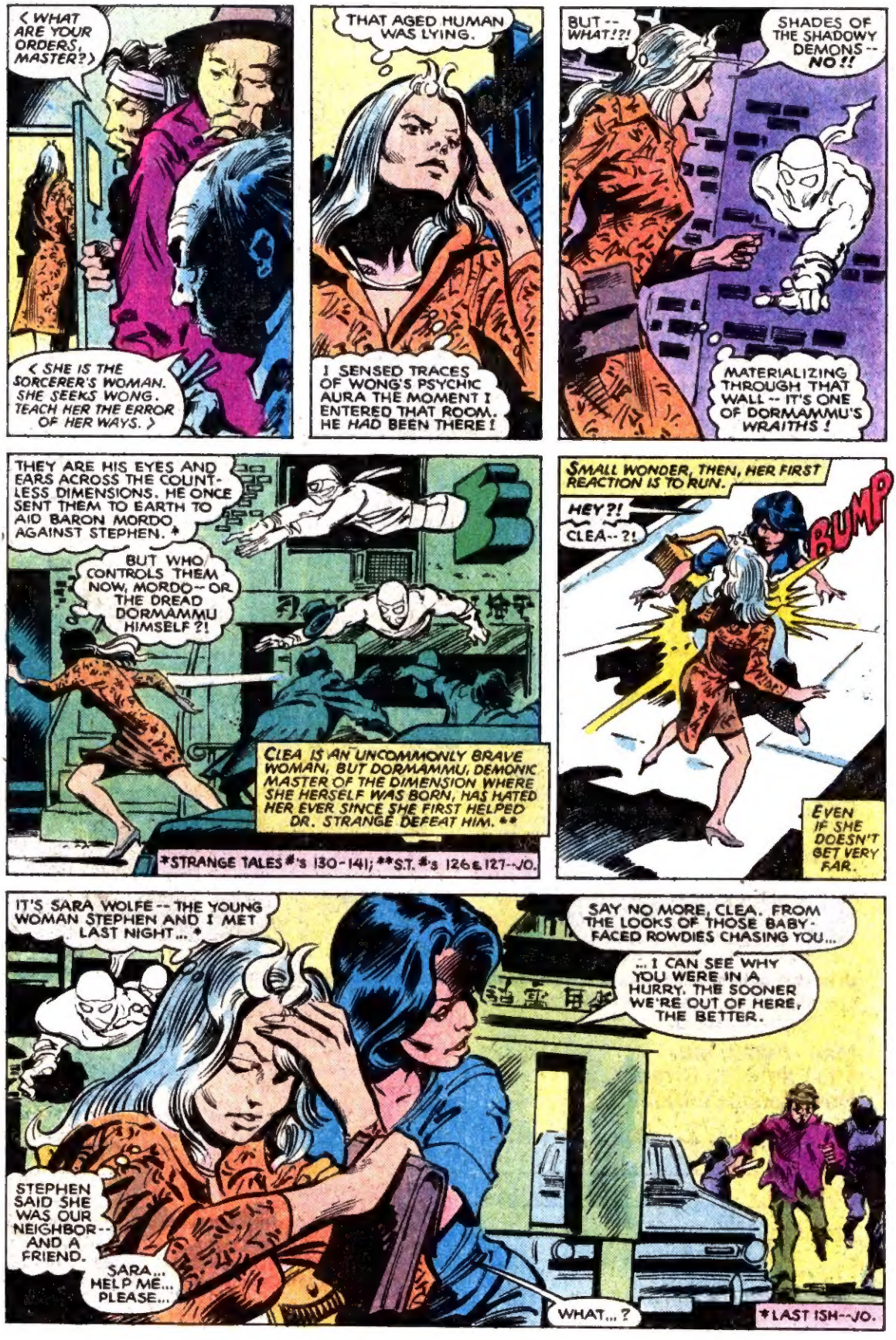

BY NOON THE NEXT DAY, STEPHEN STRANGE AND ALFEO SPINOSA ARE ABOVE THE ATLANTIC, ON THE FIRST AVAILABLE FLIGHT OUT OF NEW YORK TO THE FABLED CITY OF LIGHTS AND LOVE.
CLEA IS NOT WITH THEM.
SHE HAS STAYED BEHIND TO SEARCH FOR WONG, STRANGE'S FAITHFUL RETAINER. HE WENT OUT YESTERDAY EVENING ON A "PERSONAL ERRAND" AND DID NOT RETURN.
I FOUND A DIARY IN WONG'S ROOM. STEPHEN TRANSLATED YESTERDAY'S ENTRY FOR ME. WONG WAS GOING TO VISIT A CHILDHOOD FRIEND...

EXCUSE ME --
-- I'M LOOKING FOR A MAN NAMED SUNG, ON WATER STREET...
BEFORE CLEA CAN EVEN FINISH HER QUESTION, THE WOMAN TURNS ON HER HEEL AND HURRIES AWAY.

THE PATTERN REPEATS ITSELF THROUGHOUT CHINATOWN.
THESE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND MY QUESTIONS...
...BUT THEY'RE ALL TOO TERRIFIED TO ANSWER. WHO IS THIS SUNG? WHY ARE THEY SO AFRAID OF HIM?

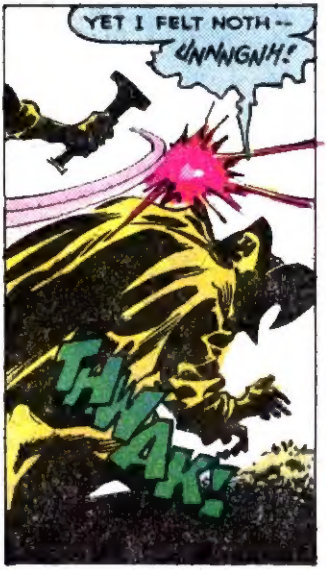
FINALLY, AFTER BUYING AND CONSULTING A MANHATTAN STREET MAP, CLEA FINDS THE ADDRESS SHE'S BEEN LOOKING FOR.
IS SUNG A -- WHAT'S THE WORD-- GANGSTER? IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE WONG HAVING SUCH A MAN FOR A FRIEND.
IN FACT, IT'S HARD TO PICTURE WONG HAVING ANY FRIENDS AT ALL.


MR. SUNG, I'M LOOKING FOR A... FRIEND OF MINE. HIS NAME IS WONG. I BELIEVE HE CAME TO SEE YOU YESTERDAY.
YOU ARE MISTAKEN, MISS. MY OFFICE WAS CLOSED ALL DAY. I SAW NO ONE.


< WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS, MASTER?>
< SHE IS THE SORCERER'S WOMAN. SHE SEEKS WONG. TEACH HER THE ERROR OF HER WAYS. >
THAT AGED HUMAN WAS LYING.
I SENSED TRACES OF WONG'S PSYCHIC AURA THE MOMENT I ENTERED THAT ROOM. HE HAD BEEN THERE!
BUT -- WHAT!?!
SHADES OF THE SHADOWY DEMONS -- NO!!
MATERIALIZING THROUGH THAT WALL -- IT'S ONE OF DORMAMMU'S WRAITHS!
THEY ARE HIS EYES AND EARS ACROSS THE COUNTLESS DIMENSIONS. HE ONCE SENT THEM TO EARTH TO AID BARON MORDO AGAINST STEPHEN. *
BUT WHO CONTROLS THEM NOW, MORDO -- OR THE DREAD DORMAMMU HIMSELF?!
CLEA IS AN UNCOMMONLY BRAVE WOMAN, BUT DORMAMMU, DEMONIC MASTER OF THE DIMENSION WHERE SHE HERSELF WAS BORN, HAS HATED HER EVER SINCE SHE FIRST HELPED DR. STRANGE DEFEAT HIM. **
*STRANGE TALES #'s 130-141; **S.T. #'s 126 & 127--JO.
SMALL WONDER, THEN, HER FIRST REACTION IS TO RUN.
HEY?!
CLEA--?!
BUMP
EVEN IF SHE DOESN'T GET VERY FAR.
IT'S SARA WOLFE -- THE YOUNG WOMAN STEPHEN AND I MET LAST NIGHT... *
STEPHEN SAID SHE WAS OUR NEIGHBOR -- AND A FRIEND.
SARA... HELP ME... PLEASE...
SAY NO MORE, CLEA. FROM THE LOOKS OF THOSE BABY-FACED ROWDIES CHASING YOU...
...I CAN SEE WHY YOU WERE IN A HURRY. THE SOONER WE'RE OUT OF HERE, THE BETTER.
WHAT...?
*LAST ISH--JO.

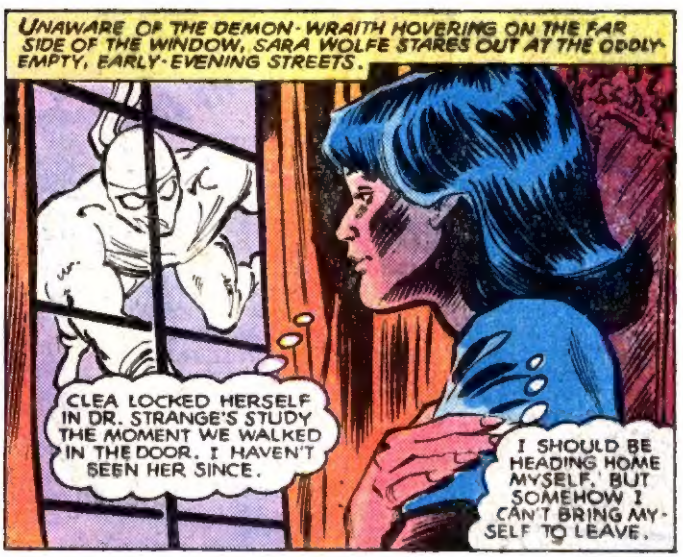
Oh, OF COURSE -- SARA CANNOT SEE THE WRAITHS. SHE THINKS I WAS FLEEING FROM THOSE YOUTHS.
SUNG MUST HAVE SENT THEM AFTER ME.
TAXI! TAXI!
< HAN -- SHE'S GETTING AWAY! >
< LET HER GO, DENG. >
< IF WE WANT HER, WE KNOW WHERE TO FIND HER. >
Whew! < THAT WAS CLOSE, BUT WE MADE IT. YOU CAN RELAX NOW, CLEA; WE'RE SAFE.
SAFE...?
LATER... DR. STRANGE AND ALFEO SPINOSA HAVE COME STRAIGHT FROM THE PARIS AIRPORT TO THE ONCE-FASHIONABLE RUE DES ARBRES ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE SEINE.
HERE IS THE HOME OF LORD JULIAN PHYFFE, WHOM STRANGE ONCE THOUGHT OF AS A FRIEND AND ALLY -- A MAN HE COULD TRUST! NOW HE'S NOT SO SURE.
AS THEY ENTER THE DARK, SILENT FOYER, THE MAGE CANCELS THE ILLUSION SPELL THAT HAD GIVEN HIS SORCERER'S GARB THE APPEARANCE OF NORMAL CLOTHES.
THE DOOR WAS UNLOCKED, STEFANO. YET THERE SEEMS TO BE NO ONE HERE, NO ELECTRICITY, EITHER.
TREAD WARILY, ALFEO.
I SENSE... EVIL IN THIS HOUSE. AND DANGER.
PHUT!
Eh?! THAT NOISE -- ?!? ALFEO, DID YOU HEAR -- ?
S-Stefano... *
ALFEO!!

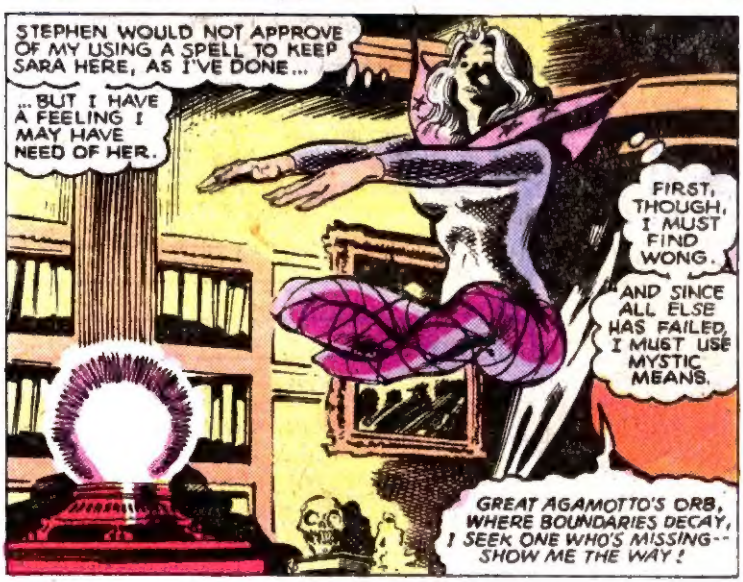
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?! HE CRUMBLED INTO DUST IN MY HANDS!!
BUT-- NOW?!?
I WAS READY FOR A MYSTIC ATTACK.


YET I FELT NOTH--
UNNNGNH!
THWAK!

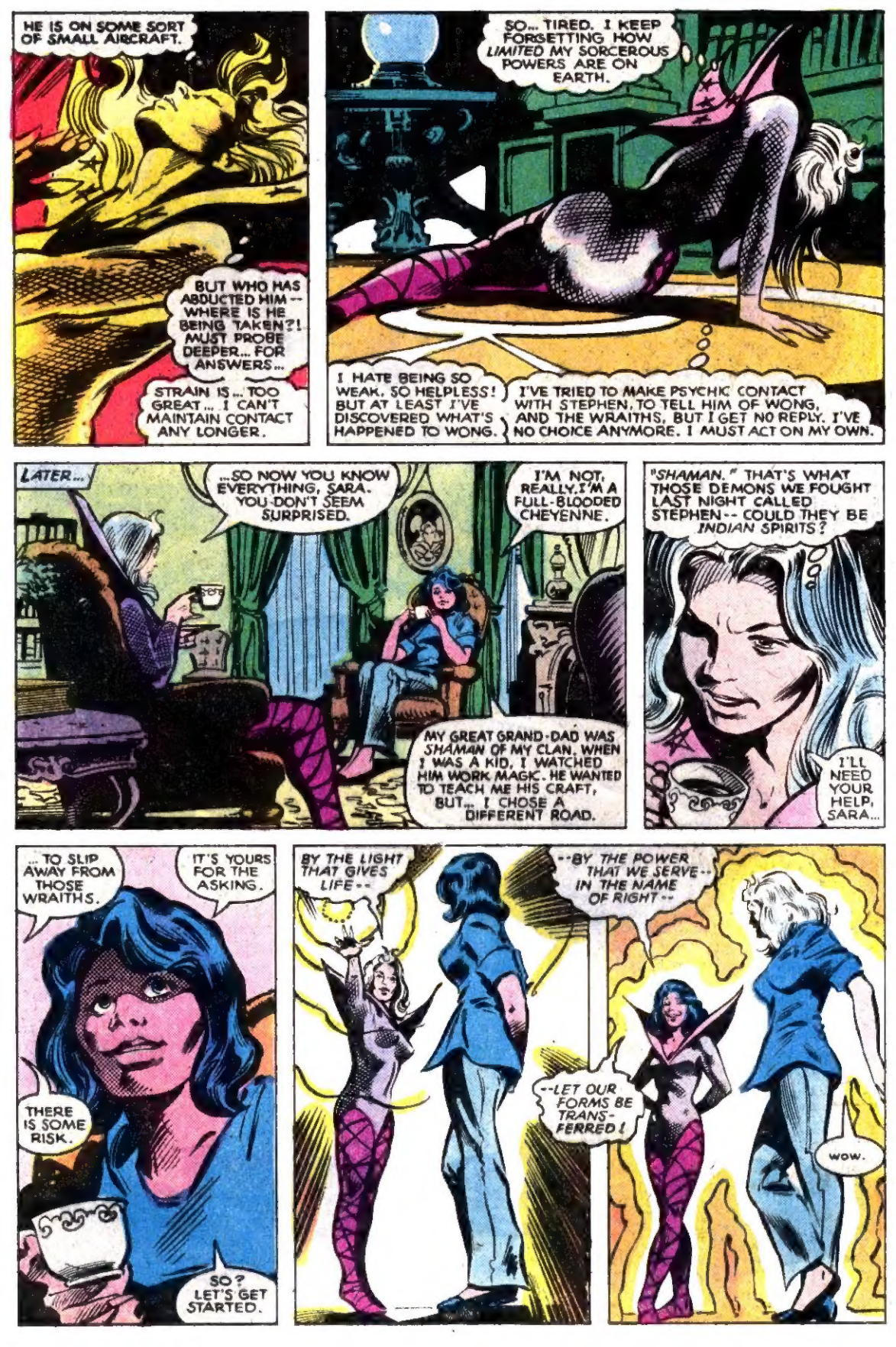
STRANGE WAS ALERT AND PREPARED FOR A SORCEROUS ASSAULT. BUT EVEN THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS CAN OCCASIONALLY PROVE VULNERABLE...
...TO A CUDGEL BLOW TO THE HEAD.

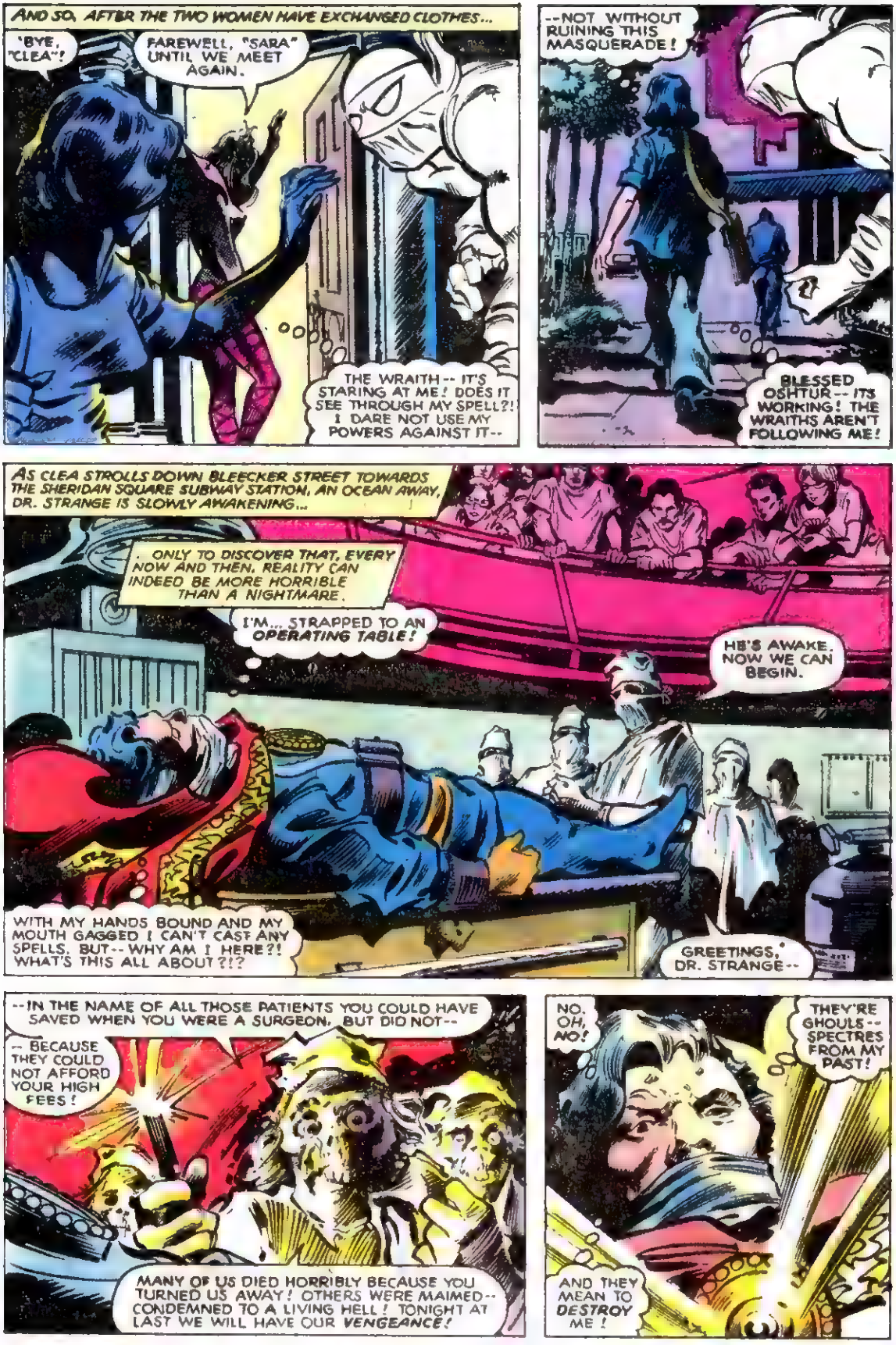
MEANWHILE, ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, ALL SEEMS PEACEFUL AROUND DR. STRANGE'S TOWNHOUSE.
BUT--AS WITH SO MANY THINGS CONCERNING THIS VENERABLE MANSION-- APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING.


UNAWARE OF THE DEMON-WRAITH HOVERING ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE WINDOW, SARA WOLFE STARES OUT AT THE ODDLY-EMPTY, EARLY-EVENING STREETS.
CLEA LOCKED HERSELF IN DR. STRANGE'S STUDY THE MOMENT WE WALKED IN THE DOOR. I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE.
I SHOULD BE HEADING HOME MYSELF. BUT SOMEHOW I CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO LEAVE.


STEPHEN WOULD NOT APPROVE OF MY USING A SPELL TO KEEP SARA HERE, AS I'VE DONE...
...BUT I HAVE A FEELING I MAY HAVE NEED OF HER.
FIRST, THOUGH, I MUST FIND WONG.
AND SINCE ALL ELSE HAS FAILED, I MUST USE MYSTIC MEANS.
GREAT AGAMOTTO'S ORB, WHERE BOUNDARIES DECAY, I SEEK ONE WHO'S MISSING-- SHOW ME THE WAY!

AT CLEA'S COMMAND, IMAGES FLARE TO LIFE IN THE HEART OF THE ANCIENT CRYSTAL...
THE VISHANTI BE PRAISED-- WONG STILL LIVES!
HE IS A PRISONER!


HE IS ON SOME SORT OF SMALL AIRCRAFT.
BUT WHO HAS ABDUCTED HIM -- WHERE IS HE BEING TAKEN?! MUST PROBE DEEPER... FOR ANSWERS...
STRAIN IS... TOO GREAT... I CAN'T MAINTAIN CONTACT ANY LONGER.
SO... TIRED. I KEEP FORGETTING HOW LIMITED MY SORCEROUS POWERS ARE ON EARTH.
I HATE BEING SO WEAK. SO HELPLESS! BUT AT LEAST I'VE DISCOVERED WHAT'S HAPPENED TO WONG.
I'VE TRIED TO MAKE PSYCHIC CONTACT WITH STEPHEN, TO TELL HIM OF WONG, AND THE WRAITHS. BUT I GET NO REPLY. I'VE NO CHOICE ANYMORE. I MUST ACT ON MY OWN.
LATER...
...SO NOW YOU KNOW EVERYTHING, SARA. YOU DON'T SEEM SURPRISED.
I'M NOT, REALLY. I'M A FULL-BLOODED CHEYENNE.
MY GREAT GRAND-DAD WAS SHAMAN OF MY CLAN. WHEN I WAS A KID, I WATCHED HIM WORK MAGIC. HE WANTED TO TEACH ME HIS CRAFT, BUT... I CHOSE A DIFFERENT ROAD.
"SHAMAN." THAT'S WHAT THOSE DEMONS WE FOUGHT LAST NIGHT CALLED STEPHEN -- COULD THEY BE INDIAN SPIRITS?
I'LL NEED YOUR HELP, SARA...
... TO SLIP AWAY FROM THOSE WRAITHS.
IT'S YOURS FOR THE ASKING.
THERE IS SOME RISK.
SO? LET'S GET STARTED.
BY THE LIGHT THAT GIVES LIFE --
--BY THE POWER THAT WE SERVE -- IN THE NAME OF RIGHT --
--LET OUR FORMS BE TRANS-FERRED!
WOW.


AND SO, AFTER THE TWO WOMEN HAVE EXCHANGED CLOTHES...
"BYE, "CLEA"!
FAREWELL, "SARA" UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN.
THE WRAITH -- IT'S STARING AT ME! DOES IT SEE THROUGH MY SPELL?! I DARE NOT USE MY POWERS AGAINST IT--
--NOT WITHOUT RUINING THIS MASQUERADE!
BLESSED OSHTUR -- ITS WORKING! THE WRAITHS AREN'T FOLLOWING ME!
AS CLEA STROLLS DOWN BLEECKER STREET TOWARDS THE SHERIDAN SQUARE SUBWAY STATION, AN OCEAN AWAY, DR. STRANGE IS SLOWLY AWAKENING...
. ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT, EVERY NOW AND THEN, REALITY CAN INDEED BE MORE HORRIBLE THAN A NIGHTMARE.
I'M... STRAPPED TO AN OPERATING TABLE!
HE'S AWAKE. NOW WE CAN BEGIN.
WITH MY HANDS BOUND AND MY MOUTH GAGGED I CAN'T CAST ANY SPELLS. BUT-- WHY AM I HERE?! WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?!?
GREETINGS, DR. STRANGE--
--IN THE NAME OF ALL THOSE PATIENTS YOU COULD HAVE SAVED WHEN YOU WERE A SURGEON, BUT DID NOT--
-- BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT AFFORD YOUR HIGH FEES!
MANY OF US DIED HORRIBLY BECAUSE YOU TURNED US AWAY! OTHERS WERE MAIMED-- CONDEMNED TO A LIVING HELL! TONIGHT AT LAST WE WILL HAVE OUR VENGEANCE!
NO. OH, NO!
THEY'RE GHOULS -- SPECTRES FROM MY PAST!
AND THEY MEAN TO DESTROY ME!

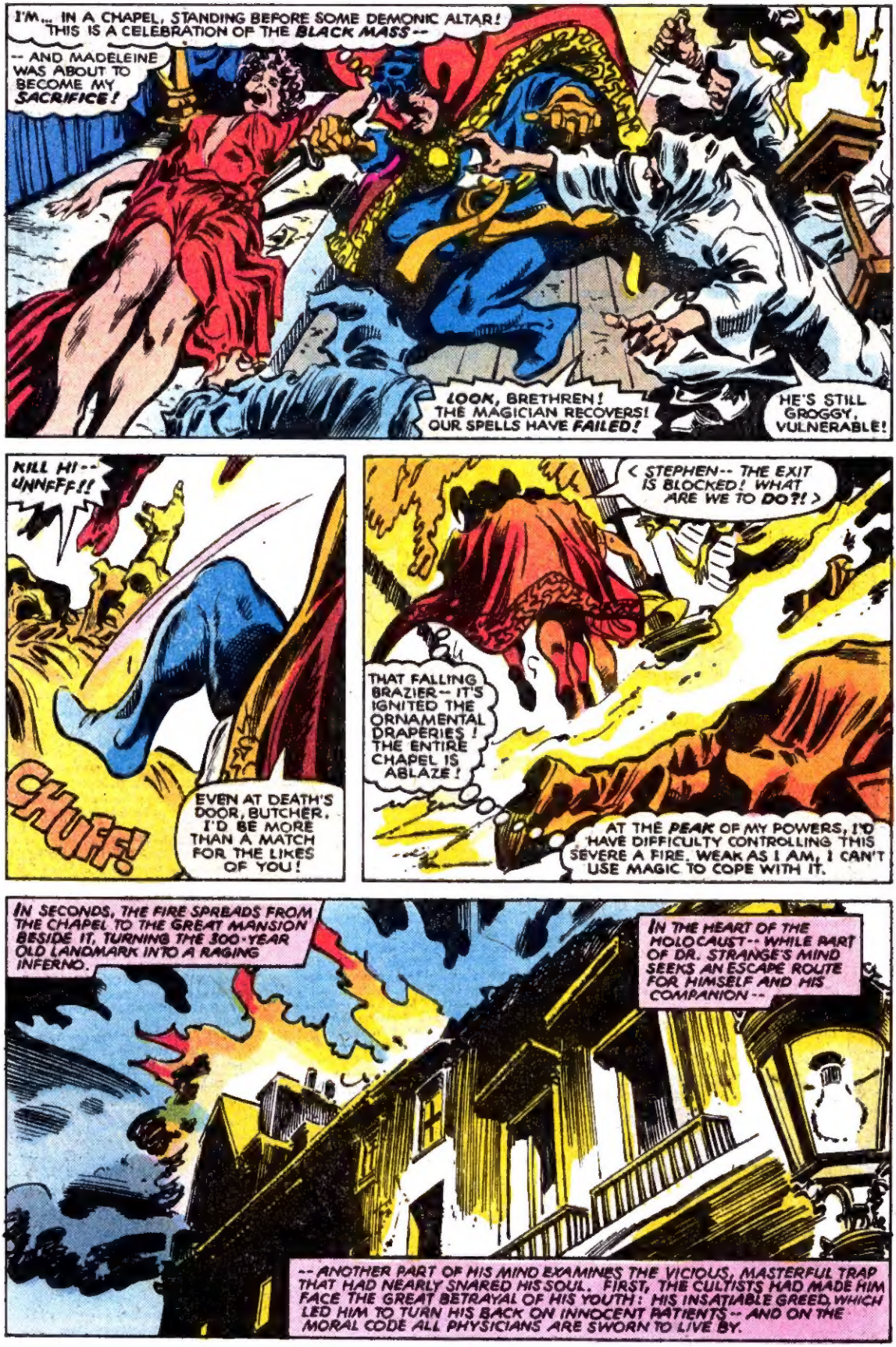
BUT ALTHOUGH I CAN CAST NO MAJOR SPELLS...
...SO LONG AS I WEAR THE ALL-SEEING EYE OF AGAMOTTO, I AM FAR FROM HELPLESS!
IF ITS RADIANCE CAN BUY ME A FEW SECONDS' GRACE -- VOILA!
EVEN "RIGHTEOUS VENGEANCE", IT SEEMS, CANNOT WITHSTAND ITS IRRESISTABLE LIGHT OF TRUTH!
BACK, BRETHREN -- BACK!
THE ACCURSED LIGHT -- IT BURNS!
I'VE HAD TIME TO FOCUS MY THOUGHTS, MY CONCENTRATION. NOW TO COMMAND MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION TO RIP THE ENTIRE OPERATING TABLE OUT OF THE FLOOR!
THE WEIGHT--!
THE TABLE IS... FAR HEAVIER THAN I'D ANTICIPATED. I MUST ACT... QUICKLY -- BEFORE THE RESTRAINING STRAPS... CRUSH ME... OR CUT ME IN TWO!
RRRAKT
MUST PIVOT THE TABLE IN MID-AIR...
...THEN ORDER THE CLOAK TO HURL IT BACKWARDS INTO THE WALL, AS HARD AS POSSIBLE!
CRR NNCH!
IF THE FATES ARE KIND, THE IMPACT SHOULD SMASH THE TABLE AND FREE ME.
I'VE DONE IT!
ALL RIGHT, GHOULS -- EXPLAIN...
BY THE ETERNAL -- THEY'RE GONE!

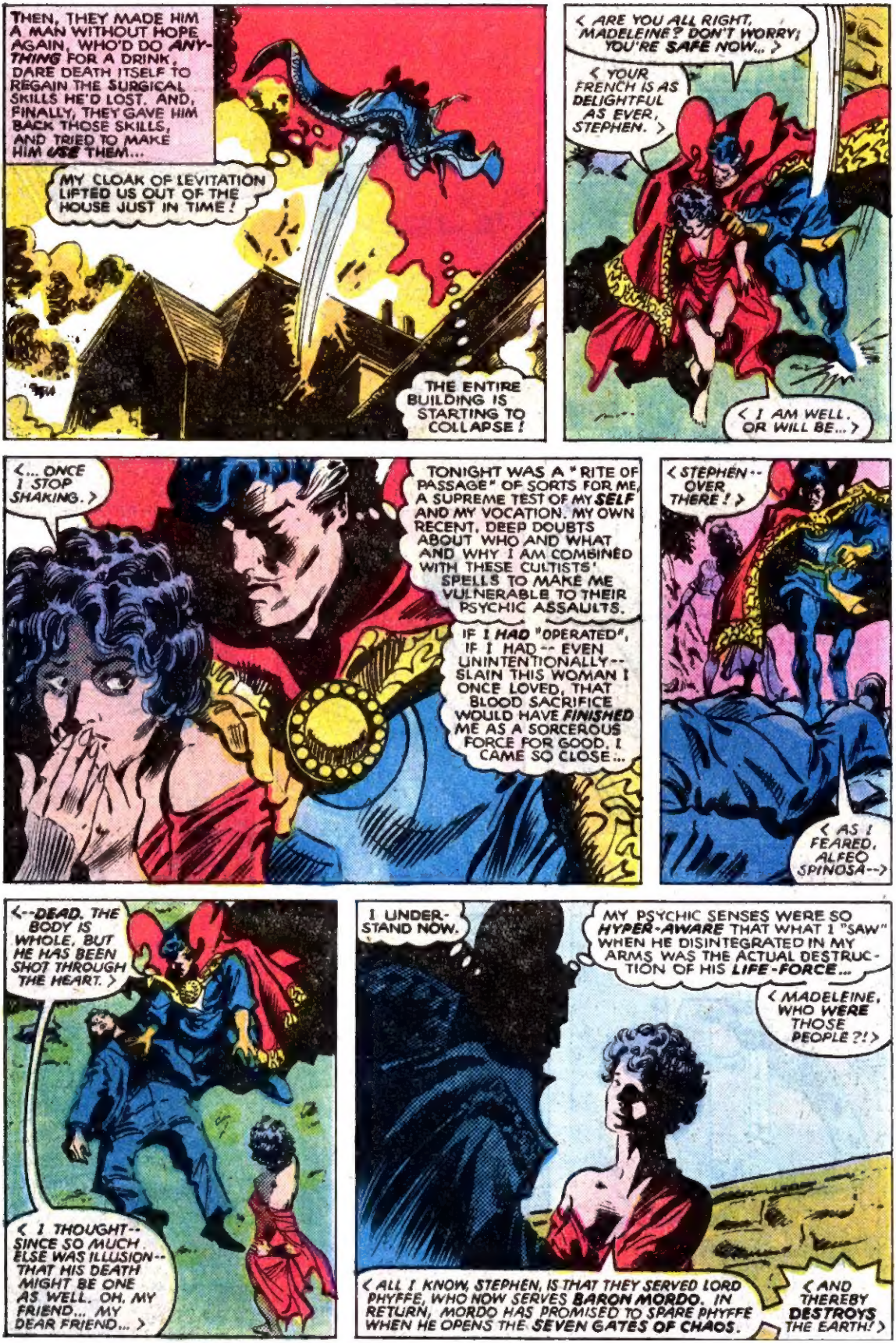
MY HEAD -- SUDDENLY IT'S BEGUN TO THROB!
WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE -- A MYSTERY... OR MADNESS?!
NEITHER, FOUL RECREANT!
WHA -- AARRRGH!
MYSTIC BOLT -- TOOK ME... COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE!
YOU ARE ON TRIAL THIS NIGHT, STEPHEN STRANGE --
-- FOR YOUR MISERABLE LIFE!
TURN AND FACE ME, FALSE PHYSICIAN -- IF YOU DARE!
INTO YOUR HANDS WAS GIVEN THE SKILL TO HEAL THE AFFLICTED. IN MY NAME, YOU SWORE A SACRED TRUST. A TRUST YOU BETRAYED --
-- OUT OF A LUST FOR GOLD!
HIP -- HIPPOCRATES?!?
IT... CAN'T BE! I'M HALLUCINATING!
AYE, VENAL ONE, THE GREEK PHYSICIAN CALLED THE PATRON SAINT OF MEDICINE. TOO LONG HAVE YOU ESCAPED MY WRATH.
WHOEVER THIS APPARITION IS...
... HIS OCCULT POWERS ARE REAL ENOUGH. THAT BOLT OF BEDEVILMENT COULD HAVE DESTROYED ME!
NOW SHALL YOU PAY FOR YOUR MANIFOLD CRIMES!
I KNOW WHAT I WAS. AND I MAY NEVER BE ABLE TO ATONE FOR WHAT I DID.
BUT STRANGE-THE-SURGEON IS NO MORE. AND THE SORCERER HE BECAME WILL NOT PERISH WITHOUT A FIGHT!

I HAVE NO WISH TO HARM YOU. YIELD AND ANSWER MY QUESTIONS, AND THIS BATTLE IS ENDED.
FOOL! THE BATTLE HAS BARELY BEGUN! YOUR NOBILITY, MAGE, IS NO MORE THAN A SHAM. IN YOUR HEART, YOU HAVE NOT CHANGED!
HE WON'T GIVE UP!
ITS TAKING ALMOST ALL MY OWN POWER AND ABILITY TO COUNTER HIS ATTACKS. BUT WHILE THE BATTLE'S WEARING ME DOWN, HIPPOCRATES' SPELLS SEEM TO BE BURNING HIM UP ALIVE!
YOU MAY DEFEAT ME, MAGICIAN.
BUT IF YOU DO, YOU MUST FACE THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR OWN CORRUPTED SOUL. THE TRUE DR. STRANGE.
IT'S OVER.
THE FEARSOME FLAMES OF THE FALTINE THAT HIPPOCRATES HURLED AGAINST ME CONSUMED HIM INSTEAD.
THE MAGE DOESN'T HAVE EVEN A MOMENT TO REFLECT ON HIS VICTORY, FOR, WITHOUT WARNING...
NAME OF A NAME -- I'M FALLING!
HE LANDS HARD, AND WAKES WITH THE FAMILIAR SOUR TASTE OF CHEAP WHISKEY IN HIS MOUTH, THE PANGS OF HUNGER IN HIS GUT. FROM THE FIRST, HE KNOWS WHERE HE IS.
OH NO PLEASE.. NOT HERE LET ME BE ANYWHERE BUT HERE.
THIS IS WHERE DESPAIR LED HIM, AFTER AN ACCIDENT DESTROYED HIS MEDICAL CAREER!

BAR
HE STAGGERS OUT INTO THE STREET. HIS TERROR IS PRIMAL, ATAVISTIC--IRRESISTABLE. HE CAN NO LONGER TELL WHICH IS THE DREAM--THE BAR...
...OR HIS LIFE AS MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS. HE TRIES TO MARSHAL HIS THOUGHTS, HIS POWERS, BUT ALL HE CAN THINK OF IS ANOTHER DRINK.
BARON, WHAT IS IT?!
ONLY A DERELICT, MY DEAR. PAY IT NO HEED.
IT'S CLEA! B-BUT WHY IS SHE... WITH MORDO...?!?
PLEASE... HELP ME.
CERTAINLY, DRUNKARD.
HERE-- GO BUY YOURSELF ANOTHER BOTTLE.
MORDO LAUGHS, AND STRANGE WEEPS...
...AND WITH THE BLINK OF AN EYE, THE SCENE CHANGES YET AGAIN, THE REFUSE-STREWN ALLEY BECOMING A SUPERBLY EQUIPPED OPERATING THEATRE.
THIS TIME, Dr. STRANGE IS THE SURGEON, HIS IS HAND THAT HOLDS A RAZOR-KEEN SCALPEL.
THE ATTENDING STAFF HANG ON HIS EVERY WORD AS, IN HIS USUAL BLASÉ TONES, HE DESCRIBES HIS SURGICAL PROCEDURE. AFTER ALL, STEPHEN STRANGE IS THE BEST THERE IS, HIS HIGH FEES ARE PROOF OF THAT.
HE STARTS TO CUT, THEN... PAUSES-- STARTS AGAIN, PAUSES AGAIN...
MY HANDS-- THEY'RE SHAKING SO HARD I CAN BARELY HOLD THE SCALPEL.
I... I'M SORRY. I'M AFRAID... I CAN'T GO ON.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, STRANGE?! YOU'VE BEEN PAID-- ALL YOU ASKED, AND IN ADVANCE! YOU MUST GO ON!
OPERATE, MAN! THIS WOMAN'S LIFE HANGS IN THE BALANCE!
I... I'M NOT ABLE... ANYMORE-- MY HANDS ARE CRIPPLED...
HEAD-- FEELS LIKE JACKHAMMERS ARE POUNDING AWAY INSIDE.
SO HARD TO THINK--BUT I MUST THINK. SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG HERE...!

WHO... IS MY PATIENT ?!
I'VE NOT SEEN HER FOR YEARS! HOW CAN THIS BE ?
MADELEINE!
QUIT STALLING, STRANGE! YOU'VE BEEN PAID-- OPERATE!
YOU HAVE YOUR BLOOD MONEY! SAVE HER!
SO MANY VOICES CHANTING... SO HARD TO RESIST...
SAVE HER! SAVE HER!!
BLINDLY, AUTOMATICALLY, HE GROPES FOR ANOTHER KNIFE...
NO!!
HAVE ALL MY YEARS, MY STUDIES, MY BATTLES, BEEN FOR NOTHING ?! IS MY SENSE OF "SELF" SO FRAGILE THAT DREAMS AND TWISTED, PERVERTED MEMORIES CAN SHATTER IT?!
I'VE SPENT HALF MY LIFE LEARNING TO FACE AND ACCEPT THE TRUTH WITHOUT FEAR. I MUST DO IT NOW-- OR I AM LOST FOREVER!
BOLD, DEFIANT WORDS-- BUT I'M FAR FROM OUT OF THE WOODS. IT IS AS IF A CLOUD WERE LYING ACROSS MY MIND, CUTTING ME OFF FROM ALL MY OCCULT KNOWLEDGE-- IF, INDEED, I TRULY HAVE ANY.
I STILL HAVE DOUBTS. AM I REALLY THE CRIPPLED SURGEON-- THE LIFE I'VE FOUND SINCE, AS A SORCERER, NO MORE THAN A DRUNKARD'S FANTASY?
REALITY SWAYS AROUND STRANGE'S ANGUISHED FORM AS HE CONCENTRATES-- TRYING DESPERATELY TO CALM HIS PANICKY THOUGHTS-- THE OPERATING ROOM BECOMING A... CHURCH? ONLY TO BECOME AN OPERATING ROOM ONCE MORE. AND THEN...
WORDS-- POPPING UNBIDDEN INTO MY MIND! IT IS A SPELL, AND-- BY THE ANCIENT ONE! I KNOW HOW TO USE IT!
BY THE... SAND THAT TIME HAS SHIFTED-- BY THE WINDS OF WEIRD... WATOOMB-- LET THE MASKING VEIL BE LIFTED-- THOUGH ITS LIFTING MIGHT BRING DOOM!


I'M... IN A CHAPEL, STANDING BEFORE SOME DEMONIC ALTAR! THIS IS A CELEBRATION OF THE BLACK MASS --
-- AND MADELEINE WAS ABOUT TO BECOME MY SACRIFICE!
LOOK, BRETHREN! THE MAGICIAN RECOVERS! OUR SPELLS HAVE FAILED!
HE'S STILL GROGGY, VULNERABLE!
KILL HI-- UNNEFF!!
CHUFF!
EVEN AT DEATH'S DOOR, BUTCHER, I'D BE MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE LIKES OF YOU!
< STEPHEN-- THE EXIT IS BLOCKED! WHAT ARE WE TO DO?! >
THAT FALLING BRAZIER-- IT'S IGNITED THE ORNAMENTAL DRAPERIES! THE ENTIRE CHAPEL IS ABLAZE!
AT THE PEAK OF MY POWERS, I'D HAVE DIFFICULTY CONTROLLING THIS SEVERE A FIRE. WEAK AS I AM, I CAN'T USE MAGIC TO COPE WITH IT.
IN SECONDS, THE FIRE SPREADS FROM THE CHAPEL TO THE GREAT MANSION BESIDE IT, TURNING THE 300-YEAR OLD LANDMARK INTO A RAGING INFERNO.
IN THE HEART OF THE HOLOCAUST-- WHILE PART OF DR. STRANGE'S MIND SEEKS AN ESCAPE ROUTE FOR HIMSELF AND HIS COMPANION --
-- ANOTHER PART OF HIS MIND EXAMINES THE VICIOUS, MASTERFUL TRAP THAT HAD NEARLY SNARED HIS SOUL. FIRST, THE CULTISTS HAD MADE HIM FACE THE GREAT BETRAYAL OF HIS YOUTH: HIS INSATIABLE GREED, WHICH LED HIM TO TURN HIS BACK ON INNOCENT PATIENTS -- AND ON THE MORAL CODE ALL PHYSICIANS ARE SWORN TO LIVE BY.


THEN, THEY MADE HIM A MAN WITHOUT HOPE AGAIN, WHO'D DO ANYTHING FOR A DRINK, DARE DEATH ITSELF TO REGAIN THE SURGICAL SKILLS HE'D LOST. AND, FINALLY, THEY GAVE HIM BACK THOSE SKILLS, AND TRIED TO MAKE HIM USE THEM...
MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION LIFTED US OUT OF THE HOUSE JUST IN TIME!
THE ENTIRE BUILDING IS STARTING TO COLLAPSE!
< ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MADELEINE? DON'T WORRY, YOU'RE SAFE NOW... >
< YOUR FRENCH IS AS DELIGHTFUL AS EVER, STEPHEN. >
< I AM WELL. OR WILL BE... >
< ...ONCE I STOP SHAKING. >
TONIGHT WAS A "RITE OF PASSAGE" OF SORTS FOR ME, A SUPREME TEST OF MY SELF AND MY VOCATION. MY OWN RECENT, DEEP DOUBTS ABOUT WHO AND WHAT AND WHY I AM COMBINED WITH THESE CULTISTS' SPELLS TO MAKE ME VULNERABLE TO THEIR PSYCHIC ASSAULTS.
IF I HAD "OPERATED", IF I HAD -- EVEN UNINTENTIONALLY -- SLAIN THIS WOMAN I ONCE LOVED, THAT BLOOD SACRIFICE WOULD HAVE FINISHED ME AS A SORCEROUS FORCE FOR GOOD. I CAME SO CLOSE...
< STEPHEN -- OVER THERE! >
< AS I FEARED, ALFEO SPINOSA -- >
<--DEAD. THE BODY IS WHOLE, BUT HE HAS BEEN SHOT THROUGH THE HEART. >
< I THOUGHT -- SINCE SO MUCH ELSE WAS ILLUSION -- THAT HIS DEATH MIGHT BE ONE AS WELL. OH, MY FRIEND... MY DEAR FRIEND... >
I UNDERSTAND NOW.
MY PSYCHIC SENSES WERE SO HYPER-AWARE THAT WHAT I "SAW" WHEN HE DISINTEGRATED IN MY ARMS WAS THE ACTUAL DESTRUCTION OF HIS LIFE-FORCE...
< MADELEINE, WHO WERE THOSE PEOPLE?! >
< ALL I KNOW, STEPHEN, IS THAT THEY SERVED LORD PHYFFE, WHO NOW SERVES BARON MORDO. IN RETURN, MORDO HAS PROMISED TO SPARE PHYFFE WHEN HE OPENS THE SEVEN GATES OF CHAOS.
< AND THEREBY DESTROYS THE EARTH! >